

# “Housing as a Race Equity Issue” by Demetria McCain (Nov/Dec 2020 P&R Issue)

---

By Demetria McCain ([click here for the pdf](https://prrac.wpengine.com/newsletters/nov-dec2020.pdf))<<https://prrac.wpengine.com/newsletters/nov-dec2020.pdf>>

Against a pumpkin-patterned background, a Black woman posted a November query to a Facebook page hosted by a local property manager asking how she should go about transferring her out-of-state Section 8 housing choice voucher to North Dallas, Irving, Allen or Plano. Two days later we, the Inclusive Communities Project (ICP), posted results of our second landlord survey that sought information about which multifamily landlords accept applicants who use housing choice vouchers. The survey captured the Facebook inquirer’s two counties of interest (Dallas and Collin) as well as two others (Denton and Rockwall). All counties fell within the Dallas Metroplex, our regional housing market.

ICP’s 2020 results are based on a survey of 1413 reasonably-priced private market apartment complexes. With the assistance of Daniel & Beshara P.C.’s researchers, the survey found seven percent acceptance by landlords when asked if they would rent to voucher holders. However, 2017 research found twelve percent acceptance. A comparison of the two years showed a significant increase in discrimination. A closer look revealed that only five percent of the complexes in majority white non-Hispanic zip codes accepted housing choice vouchers, while twenty-two percent in majority Black zip codes accepted vouchers. With Blacks accounting for over eight-five percent of the Dallas Housing Authority’s voucher population, the segregative impact of such a disproportionate acceptance tells a grim story.

The woman’s Facebook post was not seeking housing in the parts of the City of Dallas or Dallas Metroplex that are replete with subsidized housing, high poverty, governmental neglect and racial isolation. Her post specified the lower poverty, better resourced areas of our housing market as the focus of her housing search, areas for which a host of barriers like voucher discrimination exist for low income housing seekers. She was attempting to actualize the “choice” in the promise of the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

The problems of residential segregation and housing discrimination have impacted the lived experiences of Black people for decades and have been allowed to persist across multiple administrations, Republican- and Democrat-led. Included are experiences like those dramatized by Lorraine Hansberry in her semi-autobiographical 1959 Broadway play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, when restrictive covenants and the acts of the real estate industry played active roles in determining where the Younger family could and could not live. But experiences also include present day families, like the Facebook poster, who desire access to neighborhood services and opportunities that they believe will best help their children thrive.

Thriving is what we have not been doing as a country. Many of us are hurt and angry. The discrimination in how Blacks are treated intersects with too many public sectors to count including public safety, health and housing. A dog whistle by a president who tells suburban moms to not worry because he is going to make certain low income housing does not invade their neighborhoods does nothing to ease already existing housing challenges.

No administration in recent memory has espoused promises of better housing outcomes as part of racial equity priorities. As neither president-elect Biden, nor vice president-elect Harris claim to be fair housing aficionados, the advocacy community should take credit for the team’s recognition of housing as a racial equity issue. While plans, platforms and priorities mean little without action, it is encouraging to see such a shift in articulation of the problem. If this shift takes hold of decision makers who have the power to turn the tide on the artificiality of residential segregation, then we may live to see the day when HUD enforces the affirmatively furthering fair housing mandate of the Fair Housing Act, CDBG-funded governmental entities no longer sit silent when landlords discriminate against voucher holders within their jurisdictional boundaries, and landlords no longer erect barriers to qualified Black rental applicants. Sufficient resources for fair housing enforcement and the actualization of federal housing programs that affirmatively further fair housing would also be welcomed changes.

Housing as a racial equity issue is what the authors of the Fair Housing Act had in mind. After more than fifty years, let us look toward the possibility of moving closer to the goal.

*Demetria McCain (dmccain@inclusivecommunities.net) is president of the Inclusive Communities Project in Dallas and a member of PRRAC’s Board of Directors.*

([Facebook](#))    ([Twitter](#))    ([Email](#))    ([LinkedIn](#))

---



